

## No Gain without Pain: Feelings and Emotional Practices in an Information System Project

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses an interpretive case study on feelings and emotions in an information systems (IS) project focusing on the subsequent emotional practices adopted by the IS project members. We analyzed the data from interviews with fourteen IS project members. The analysis revealed the connection between specific feelings (dissatisfaction, fear, irritation, blame, frustration, feeling of failure) and specific emotional practices in an IS project (using power, criticizing, airing the frustration, seeking support, adjusting situation/ adapting to unwanted situation, using black humor or sarcasm, gossiping, practicing avoidance or withdrawal). We discovered that vastly different emotional practices can relate to the same basic feeling experienced by IS project members, illuminating the humble origins of the destructive emotional practice that affects negatively the outcome of an IS project. Our study extends the current understanding of the role of feelings, and how feelings relate to emotional practices in an IS project.*

### 1. Introduction

The importance of social issues in information system (IS) projects has long been acknowledged (e.g. [19]). Yet to date, the literature on IS projects largely ignores the studies of feelings and emotions [7], [23], [24] despite calls to pay more explicit attention to emotions in an IS project [23], [24], and managing conflicts in IS development projects [3]. Feelings and emotions are said to be helpful for individuals, as they provide information on, for example, what is important, meaningful or harmful to an individual [18]. It has been highlighted that emotion is everywhere, often operating almost invisibly [18]. In short, it may transpire that we are much less rational than we like to believe [14], [18].

Furthermore, empirical research on feelings, emotions, and emotional practices in IS projects remains scarce [23], [24], and we do not have enough understanding how IS project members manage (or regulate) their own emotions, or how different emotions influence the outcomes of IS projects.

These have not attracted systematic research [24], although one can intuitively visualize the way in which members deal with their feelings such as disappointment, and frustration that emerge during an IS project. In this paper we address the need for understanding the role of feelings and emotions in an IS project. We demonstrate how feelings affect the behaviors of the IS project members and the productivity of the IS project. Furthermore, the terms ‘feelings’ and ‘emotions’ are distinguished in our study: feelings is classified as a subjective experience whereas emotion always involves some behavior or action that we call emotional practice. What an IS project member feels is not considered a result of what has happened; rather it is an indication of what will happen. In other words, what kind of behavior - emotional practice - might follow from the often negative feelings expressed by the subjects. Emotional practices therefore refer to the behavior of IS project member caused by with specific feelings.

This interpretive case study research is guided by the following research questions: 1) *What kinds of feelings arise in an IS project?* 2) *What emotional practices are associated with different feelings in an IS project?* The contribution of this study is twofold. First, we show what kinds of feelings emerge in an IS project - ‘those things IS project members picture and feel within themselves’, and second, how the feelings affect emotional practice - ‘the physical actions to communicate with the other IS project members’. This study also increases understanding of the dynamic and complex role of negative feelings in the decision-making process in an IS project.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section we define the key terms: feelings, emotions

and emotional practices, and summarize the relevant research literature. This is followed by the description of the research case, the method employed and our findings. We then discuss the implications for IS project management. A summary of the contributions and avenues for future research follow the discussion.

## 2. Theoretical Background

In this section we discuss the relevant literature on the paper topic including the basic elements of emotions and emotional practices, and review the studies on emotions in the IS field

### 2.1. Emotional Practices

Defining emotion is a complex task, and it is even questioned whether emotion is actually knowable [28]. Emotion is said to refer for example to moods [22], affects [1], temperament [4], and behavior [22]. Some studies (e.g. [28]) state that emotions are both expressions of inner processes but also multidimensional ‘complexes’ (thinking, feeling, and moving) or ‘modes of communication’ which are both cultural and corporeal, and arise in social relationships of power and interdependence. Researchers have argued that it is impossible to separate emotion from cognition, behavior or work [8], [23]. Therefore, it is hard to understand work if emotional issues are ignored [8]. Fineman [11] highlights that organizations and work are defined by emotions, and emotion is necessary for producing reliable knowledge – they are part and parcel of each other. Some go as far as to suggest that two-thirds of the competencies associated with excellent performance at work are in fact social and emotional in nature [20].

Several researchers in other fields [1], [16], [26] have underlined that rather than trying to define what emotions are, a researcher should focus on what emotions do. A large body of theoretical and empirical work testifies to the keen interest in how emotional states influence work-related cognition and behavior [9], [12], or how people may use different strategies, such as “producing a false smile” in order to give a desired impression [13]. Research on organizational studies has also shown how emotions affect for example the decision-making and group processes [2]. However, although it has been noted that one’s feelings do not always match emotional displays, it is argued that there is a lack of studies that examine the emotional influence in terms of how other people affect our emotions, and why and how such emotional influence emerge [25].

Furthermore, in social sciences there has been a call to study the processes of how emotions and social context interact and, as a result, modify each other [5]. It has been suggested that emotions ‘should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices’ [1], [26]. Thus, different emotional practices do not only produce emotions, but feelings/emotions themselves can be viewed as a practical engagement with the world (e.g. [25]). The term ‘emotional practices’ has been a topic of increasing interest in different fields during last ten years [21], [26].

### 2.2. Emotions in Information System Research

Because our focus is specifically on feelings and emotional practices in IS project, the following literature review does not include studies on feelings and emotions in the context of human computer interaction (information technology (IT) and use; IT, identity and emotions etc.). Instead of it we have focused on the literature, which deals with IS projects, and emotions on the IS project work. The figure 1 summarizes the IS research on emotional aspects in IS projects.

Topic	Authors	Subjects	Method
IT professionals' emotional dissonance, which refers to the conflict between the norms of emotional display and the employee's felt emotion	[24]	IT employees of a Fortune 100 company	Survey of 225 IT employees. 161 usable responses were received (72 per cent). Respondents' positions ranged from managers (20) to programmers/analysts (82) to systems support/customer support specialists (40).
The skills associated with ICT work revolved around social and emotional competence and technical knowledge	[15]	Swiss software companies	Organizational ethnography, interviews with 26 people (16 men and 10 women)
The neglected role of anxiety and psychological security in organizational life	[16]	The evolution of an Ireland - India IS offshoring relationship.	Longitudinal, interpretive study. Interviews of the 14 key players involved in the project, in formal and informal settings, many of them repeatedly and for extended periods of time.
The IS-related organizational change associated with modernisation of the British National Health Service since the early 1980s	[23]	The London Ambulance Service (LAS) 8 years after the disastrous collapse of the LAS Computer Aided Dispatch system in 1992.	A historical narrative covering 20 years of IS innovation at the LAS.

**Figure 1. The research on emotional aspects in IS projects.**

The study of [23] explored the nature and role of emotions in IS innovation and claimed that the IS literature seems silent on emotions suggesting that IS research and professional practice are regarded as purely rational processes. The same study [23]

emphasized that affections are involved in the IS process but no significant effort has been made to provide any analytical attention. Thus, by narrowing human agency to its cognitive dimensions, it is impossible to consider the totality of human capacities that are either positively or negatively engaged with IS innovation processes [23].

McGrath's study [23] is already ten years old, and despite our extensive literature review, no other studies on feelings and emotional practices in an IS project have been found. This fact confirms the significance of our study on feelings and emotional practices in IS projects. Following Scheer ([26]), we emphasize that emotions can be viewed as a practice – that is, as an emotional practice. Such practices are something that people do. Therefore feelings and emotions are mutually implicated. Feelings are 'those things IS project members picture and feel within themselves' whereas emotional practice are the 'physical actions (based on feelings) to communicate with the other IS project members'.

### 3. Project Background

This section presents the very complex background of the IS project we studied. This history provides some necessary context and helps to understand the findings.

#### 3.1. History of the Project: from Project I to Project II

The IS project (called Project II later) was preceded by a pilot project called Project I, which had the aim of building and implementing a specialized record management system for four public sector organizations. Project I was implemented in three steps (specification, interface pilot and planning). The project lasted for three years. Table 1 contains the actors in the pilot project. The pilot project was influential in framing the organization of the larger project we studied (Project II), and it also contained many of the same actors. Alpha was the leading organization for the pilot project, as the organization, who applied for and received funding for the pilot project.

**Table 1. Organizations involved in Project I.**

Organization	Role of Organization
Ministry	Ministry responsible for funding the pilot project
Nofco	Consortium of user organizations in charge of the project (a virtual organization)

Lambda	Consortium of user organizations that used a similar IS
Theta, Iota	Suppliers of the software
Eta	Expert consultants
Alpha	User organization that was a member of Nofco and Lambda and initiated the project

Project II built substantially on the pilot project Project I, and contained some of the same actors. The development of Project II involved the computerization of work processes to facilitate office work, the consolidation of information across organizations, and the management of key activities. In the Project II, Nofco was no longer in charge of the project management organization. Epsilon was brought in to perform and manage the project management. The basic function of Nofco was to promote and develop both regionally and nationally the utilization of ICT, and to enhance inter-organizational cooperation in multiple research-related issues and administrative practices. The key user organizations now consisted of Alpha, the original lead user organization, plus user organizations Beta, Gamma and Delta. There were 21 user organizations altogether, and the aim was that it would be these 21 organizations that would eventually use Project II. The organizations collaborated with the relevant Ministry, suppliers and consultants. Figure 2 sums up the actors and their previous role, if any, in Project I.

Actors	Role of Organization	Previous Role in Project I
Ministry	Ministry responsible for funding the IOIS project. A part the Steering Group.	Yes, it was a funder
Nofco	Consortium of 21 user organizations (Virtual organization)	Yes, Nofco was in charge of Project I project.
Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta	Lead user organizations in the project. Alpha was also the fund holder for the project. A part of both the Steering Group and the Project Group.	Yes, Alpha initiated Project I
Epsilon	Organization responsible for project management and research objectives. A part of both the Steering Group and the Project Group. The Quality Assurance group came from Epsilon.	No. Epsilon was a new player for Project II.
Zeta	Software company that supplies the software solutions for the project	No. Zeta was a new player for the new project as well
Eta	Part of the national research network that develop research and IT based services for the needs of research and education, and the supporting IT administration. Acted as an expert advisor. Withdrew from the project before it ended.	Yes, Eta had a role of advisor on Project I

**Figure 2. Organizations involved in Project II.**

#### 3.2. Organization of the Project II

The Project Group consisted of representatives from the four user organizations (Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta), the Nofco representative, the Eta

representative, and five researchers from Epsilon. One of these researchers from Epsilon was the leader responsible for the project and another acted as the project manager. The Quality Assurance Group (QAG) of the project consisted of three other researchers from Epsilon. The QAG was responsible for the documentation produced by suppliers. The Steering Group was responsible for the whole project, and decided key policies for the project. The Project Group then converted those policies into project decisions. In addition to the managers representing the user organization, the project steering group included representatives of the Ministry, Nofco (the consortium of user organizations), and two researchers (Epsilon, the research organization) who were also the individuals in charge of the project.

There were two suppliers in the project: Zeta and Eta. The two suppliers carried out the implementation. The first supplier, Zeta (a company producing browser-related software solutions) acted as the main supplier in the project. The other supplier, Eta, was a part of the national research network that developed research and information technology-based services for the needs of research and education, and the supporting information technology administration. Eta, eventually, withdrew from the project. The Eta people thought that their role, as it played out in the project, was far more complex and arduous than agreed in the original project brief, so, for them it made sense to withdraw.

## 4. Methodology

We have chosen an interpretive case study approach [17]. Our data collection consisted of fourteen (14) free flowing, in-depth interviews of IS project members (250 pages of transcripts). These interviews can be defined as narratives [6], containing the interviewees' own stories about the project and its progress. In addition to these interviews, the data consisted of observations of project meetings (20 project meeting observations), diaries (80 pages), project memoranda (48) and emails (over 700) sent by project members to each other during these years. The first author of this paper attended project meetings regularly and always made her/his own observations and took detailed notes. The interviewees and their roles and organizations are explained in the table 2.

**Table 2. Interviews, their roles and organizations**

Organizations	Interviewees (14) and their roles
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Research Organization Epsilon (4 interviews)	Matthew, Organizer, a Member of steering group Ruth, Project Manager, Member of steering and project group Thomas; Simon (both members of Quality Group)
User organizations (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta) (4 interviews)	Lucy, Organizer, Alpha, a member of steering group; Sophie, User, Delta; Lisa, User, Alpha; Kathy, User, Beta; (Sophie, Lisa, Kathy, members of the project group)
Suppliers; Eta, and Zeta (4 interviews)	Peter, John, Jack, Daniel (Suppliers, Members of project group). (John, Peter, and Jack, members of Project I as well)
Nofco (2 interviews)	Sarah (Project group member and a Member of Project I) Sheila (a Steering group member and Project manager of Project I).

Naming feelings and emotions is very challenging because people tend to attach different meanings to the same words. Thus, to overcome the problem of naming we focused on the 'lived experiences', allowing the interviewees use their own words to tell their own story about the IS project and its progress. Simonsen [27] has emphasized that it is important to consider the connection between everyday language and everyday practice – pointing out how these are two sides of the same coin, each needing its "other half" for its own existence.

## 5. Findings

In this section we focus on specific feelings as expressed by IS project members. These include fear; dissatisfaction; irritation; blaming; frustration, and feelings of failure. Our findings show then how these different negative feelings are associated with different emotional practices such as using power, criticizing, airing the frustration, seeking support, adjusting situation/ adapting to unwanted situation, using black humor or sarcasm, gossiping, practicing avoidance or withdrawal.

### 5.1. Dissatisfaction

Matthew (Organizer, Alpha) especially felt dissatisfied with the previous work (requirement specification and analysis conducted in Project I) and concluded that the project manager from Nofco needed to be changed because of neglected project

management issues. Matthew was not satisfied with the work of suppliers either. Because of this, the suppliers were replaced one year later. The reason being poor quality of the specifications: “Perhaps we can say that there was some kind of “blundering” in the project...” (Matthew, Organizer). Dissatisfaction with the quality of the earlier specifications was one reason why the organizers (Matthew from Epsilon and Lucy from Alpha) wanted to change project members for the Project II. Lucy (Organizer, Alpha) trusted Matthew (Organizer, Epsilon) although she was worried about the reorganization. This led to the situation where Lucy thought that some members of Nofco (the project management for Project I project) might have interpreted the launch of the Project II as an indication of a lack of confidence in them.

At the same time Lucy (Organizer, Alpha) sought assurance that the people who were leading the previous project (Project I) did not confuse the reorganization with a lack of trust: “I still remember that I called Sheila on the day before Christmas Eve. Sheila was at home and I told her that we intended to apply for grant from the Ministry and asked about her opinion about it to make sure this was not understood as an infringement...”. Ruth (project manager, Project II) was dissatisfied with the project work, for example, when Simon (project member for Project II from the same organization as Ruth) commented in one project memo that their suppliers were a risk for the project. Thomas, who is another member of the project group and member of the same organization as Ruth and Simon, also commented on this issue: “That seemed to be a sensitive thing... as the pressure increases, the surface of the balloon becomes thinner too... But, getting back to business, I saw Ruth yesterday and during a corridor chat, Ruth mentioned it. Ruth’s interpretation was that suppliers had been chosen, so there was no risk. In ‘the’ quality group ‘it’ had clearly been discussed that the ineffectiveness of a supplier was a big risk...”. It was speculated that for some reason they (Ruth and Simon) did not get on well with each other. After this, Ruth sent an email to Simon (Epsilon) to state that his presence in project meetings was not necessary. Simon was amazed and asked if some other project management presence was necessary if his presence was not required.

In this project, the division of work between the suppliers (Zeta and Eta) proved to be challenging especially as the suppliers experienced the division of work in different ways. There were also differing views on the division of work within Eta’s organization. Jack (Eta) was dissatisfied with the division of the work. According to him (Jack, Eta), all possible work belonging to the suppliers was

given to them in the project, while according to John (Supplier, Eta) they could have put more effort and commitment in some matters, and take more responsibility: “This was probably because we received a role that was more demanding than the one we pursued in the initial discussions and negotiations... We realized that we could not continue in this way...” (Jack, Supplier, Eta). Jack (Eta) felt that the project manager was not aware of Eta’s resources and this finally led to the situation that Eta eventually withdrew from the project in 2005. Sarah and Sheila (Nofco) and Jack (Eta), also felt that the project manager did not inform them early enough about tasks they were expected to do. A good example was when John (Supplier, Eta) felt dissatisfaction with the professionalism of the quality assurance group: “the review group did not take a stand on whether the process was done correctly; they only paid attention to whether the documents were correctly recorded, which is (a) slightly different matter...”. Dissatisfaction with the displacement of the leadership of the project was already felt in the early phase of the project: “The biggest doubt was caused by the fact that the new project manager was geographically far away...”. (Lucy, Organizer, Alpha).

When the project work started, a user (Sophie, Delta) raised the question of whether the organizers in charge of the project were aware of the existence of another similar project (Project I). Another user from a different organization viewed this as a possibility to start with a clean slate. Several representatives of the user organizations (Alpha, Beta and Gamma) met at the first stage of the project (in March 2004) and the researcher’s diary notes indicate that they did not want to continue using the previous specifications. One user stressed that Project I imposed pressures on the current project in the sense that an element of competition came into the project work. Ruth, project manager experienced it as follows: “I have had the feeling that we all are not pulling together...I have had the feeling that people try to find disadvantages about me, and that people approach what I have or haven’t done with a predominantly negative viewpoint. Well, I know very well that I haven’t done things as they’re presented by the books...”.

## 5.2. Fear

Some project members, for example Ruth, the project manager of Project II, experienced fear. For example, she was concerned as to how some people (i.e. Eta people) would be able to do their tasks or she saw other members (especially Nofco people) as a

threat. Lucy (organizer) worried about how Ruth (project manager, Epsilon) would cope with the new task. Nofco members were seen a threat to the project (for example by the project manager and many users), and many project members felt that Nofco effectively held an informal veto due their involvement in Project I. Another manifestation of how threatened people felt was how people communicated secretly with Ruth, the Project manager. Eta's representative John described this "gossiping" as follows: "We always tattled about all the faults to the project manager [laughter], because we didn't want to start speaking directly about everything...". This led to the situation where the project manager helped Eta people to get take some decisions in the project.

Ruth, the project manager of Project II was dissatisfied and complained that decisions were not seen as final, even though the decisions had been made at previous project meetings. To achieve a feeling of security, she manipulated the situation by using her legitimate power and not inviting all members to the project meetings (Sheila, a member of Nofco and Simon, a member of Epsilon). Some other project members guessed that she did this because in this way she was able to avoid competition between her and the previous project manager of Project I. Both suppliers (Eta and Zeta) thought that Nofco inhibited decision-making, and they wanted to take control of decision-making to ensure the project was able to go on and reach its goals, while Nofco's representatives (Sheila and Sarah) felt that too much power was given to suppliers to decide matters. Sheila expressed her thoughts as follows: "I feel this type of situation gives the suppliers a lot of opportunities to very influentially participate in decision-making, and, as I said earlier, I think that's quite a problem in a matter of this magnitude. These suppliers are rascals enough to gladly do and produce more than was ordered if we are not careful...".

### 5.3. Irritation

Irritation feeling refers to situations where other people in the IS project irritate someone. These other people tried to act 'smarter' than they actually are in his/her opinion. The following example illustrates this feeling. Project members attempted to make themselves to look indispensable by creating a belief that they did something valuable, which they actually did not do. In this research, Nofco had made themselves look invaluable by wrongly announcing and taking credit for work that they had neither planned nor implemented alone. Nofco announced

that a journal article had been published about the Project II. The announcement incorporated a message requesting receivers to notify their international partners of the publication of the article. At that stage, this raised criticism among the project members, because they thought that Nofco had wrongly taken credit for work that it had neither planned nor implemented alone. The issue came up among the employees of the other supplier as well as among the project management. Thus, the representative the other supplier, Walter, expressed his irritation: "...what was it that Eta had planned and Zeta implemented? And note that Zeta's name has not been mentioned at all in that connection..." (Walter, Supplier, Zeta, Email sent 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005).

Zeta's representative criticized Eta for wanting to emphasize their expertise. After one particular project meeting, Zeta's representative had indignantly called the project manager to talk about this issue (Field notes, project meeting, May 6<sup>th</sup> 2004). It was not clear to Zeta's representative what Eta actually did or planned to do in the project. According to Simon (Epsilon), the language that was used was inappropriate. He referred to situations in the project where the language used by project members towards one another was not respectful.

Some people questioned others' importance and how it affected collaboration. According to Lisa (User, Alpha), the considerable turnover of Eta's representatives and Eta's unclear role in the project significantly hindered the progress of the project. As the project progressed, the project management's trust in Eta's expertise began to wane. It was felt that the effort Eta put into the project was minimal, but they wanted to remain in the project. Thomas (project member, Epsilon) pondered that, "these are such serious matters that there must be no mistakes, so if I think of Eta's role, which we spoke about earlier, I wonder what exactly Eta's expertise is...". Thomas also mused about how the steering group should regard the matter, since not much was happening.

### 5.4. Blame

Some members felt that Nofco took all the credit but deflected all the guilt. Thomas (Epsilon) felt that the project organization got in the way of achieving goals and that the project manager blamed project members if something didn't work: "just to make sure, everyone was blamed for the lack of progress in matters...". Thomas described that there was a culture of 'promote the guilty and punish the innocent'. The project manager also blamed some other project management people about this aggression. Ruth (Epsilon) felt that Nofco's members

were aggressive when the project started but that this began to wane as the project progressed: “Nofco is no longer so aggressive – well, this aggression was this kind of, something that was hard even to name...”. The project manager also felt that the Supplier Zeta was aggressive at the beginning of the project: “I felt like he wanted to try to strangle me along the ‘phone line...”. Eta’s representative Daniel considered Zeta to be a professional software producer, but he felt that Zeta’s ‘rudeness’ hindered collaboration.

### 5.5. Frustration

Frustration was evidently felt by many members of the project. For example Thomas (Epsilon) was not convinced of the significance of his role within the project. Lisa (User representative, Alpha) felt frustration in many phases of the project: “If someone mentions the word interface once more, I’ll jump out the window...”. Lisa also explained that ‘The way I was able to motivate myself during even the worst moments was greater than the dislike I had towards matters at the time. That was always the light at the end of the tunnel: that I believed this system would be delivered even if it were the last thing I did in this world...’ (Lisa, User, Alpha). Lisa’s frustration was also palpable in the way she summarized the project in one of the last project meetings (2<sup>nd</sup> November 2006): ‘Now that the system is ready, we can commit mass suicide...’ (Lisa, User, Alpha).

Jack (Supplier, Eta) felt frustrated at the lack of communication, especially between the project manager, the other supplier (Zeta) and the users in the project: “So I feel it’s a completely unnecessary discussion and probably one reason is that I felt I was sitting at the meeting where people were mainly talking about the matters and excluding them ‘users’ even though these matters did in fact concern them very closely, and this interpretation, this translation for the users we felt was a big job, but at that time no one did it...”.

Jack expressed also his frustration on the role they received in the project. Eta eventually withdrew from the project: “We withdrew ... we realized that we could not continue in this way. This was probably because we received a role that was more demanding than the one we pursued in the initial discussions and negotiations...it was very frustrating” (Jack, Supplier, Eta). Thomas (Epsilon) also highlighted in a project group (1st November 2004) that: “it is worrying that the project manager is talking about the resource problems of Eta... The bigger concern to her seems to be that the project is some weeks late...”. Thomas also criticized the way that some things, which were presented to the steering group by the project manager, were wide of the mark: “Documents are

meaningless if things are embellished” (Thomas, Epsilon).

### 5.6. Feeling of Failure

There were also several situations where project members reflected about why collaboration did not work and why people were not able to work together in an optimal way. According to Jack (Eta), collaboration did not work at all in the project because there was no common “language”. As a result people representing different suppliers were not prepared to communicate effectively. Jack also thought that his company (Eta), as a supplier, was given an interpreter’s role for users in the project. According to Jack, one problem with collaborating with the users was that the users gave unclear, ambiguous answers to questions: “Perhaps they didn’t have an exact picture of how these two projects, Project I and Project II relate to each other either, which itself is quite a strange situation – let’s not say any more about that...”.

According to Sheila (Nofco), Eta should have made sure they kept Alpha (User organization) up to date on what their areas of operation were. According to Eta’s representative (Peter), they again acted according to instructions received from Nofco. Nofco’s representative, Sheila, thought that not even Alpha (the user organization) had a picture of how these two projects related to each other: According to Sheila (Nofco), “we had to reinvent the wheel” in the Project II. Her comment related to the efforts made to familiarize the new project members with the task. A member of the project’s management, for example, argued that the project lacked correct agreements for functional collaboration. Furthermore, project members and the steering group had different understandings of the functionality of collaboration: the members of the steering group had a more positive view of collaboration. Thomas (Epsilon) thought that the members of the steering group felt that there was no conflict.

Eta’s other representative, John, felt that collaboration with Zeta was close. Despite that, he felt that disagreements were frequent and faults were dealt with by ‘tattling’ to the project manager. Lisa (User, Alpha) felt that collaboration was very challenging and required patience due to the variety of actors and the physical distance between them. She felt that collaboration became easier as she got to know the people better but her adaptation to the project took a very long time. Nevertheless, it was not easy when collaboration was difficult and she thought it possibly resulted from people’s manner of communicating and taking care of matters. Another

user representative, Sophie (Delta), also felt that collaboration did not materialize in the project, despite numerous meetings: “And this collaboration is an interesting thing. No matter what kind of meetings were held, collaboration was not created...”.

We then continued with the further analysis of the narratives, and we were especially looking for emotional practices that were closely connected or triggered by specific feelings expressed by the subjects’ description of their lived experience in the IS-project. Our interpretation revealed several distinctive practices that were clearly triggered by the feelings described by the subjects. It is not surprising that these types of feelings were often somewhat negative, as previous research on emotion uncovered [8]. In the same paper Dasborough [8] also suggests that the negative feelings or dissatisfaction rather than contentment with current situation tends to lead to innovation or bold actions to rectify or address the situation of concern.

In our research we have identified specific emotional practices (behaviors of our interview subjects, the IS project members) such as using power, criticizing, airing frustration, seeking support, adjusting situation/ adapting to unwanted situations, using black humor or sarcasm, gossiping, practicing avoidance or withdrawal. The emerged feelings and associated Emotional Practices in the IS project are summarized in Table 3. This study shows that the same feelings can lead to different emotional practices, and vice versa the same emotional practice may originate from different feelings.

**Table 3. Feelings and associated emotional practices in an IS project**

Feelings	Emotional practice(s)
Dissatisfaction, fear, irritation	Using power
Dissatisfaction	Using power (re-organising, removing people from the project), criticising, airing frustration, seeking disadvantages, practicing withdrawal
Fear	Seeking support
Blame	Adjusting situation/ adapting to unwanted situation
Frustration	Using black humour or sarcasm, questioning the expertise of other IS project members
Fear, feeling of failure	Gossiping
Fear	Avoidance

## 6. Discussion

This study demonstrates that when assessing the feelings/emotions during an IS project we should focus on considering their potentially negative implications for the project. This line of reasoning (‘What feelings/emotions lead to’) is helpful in not only for understanding what feelings are present under what conditions but also for understanding how the feelings affect the behavior of the IS project members, eventually leading to an impact on the productivity of the IS project. Our interpretive case study research was guided by the questions: 1) *What kinds of feelings arise in an IS project?* 2) *What emotional practices relate to (are associated with) different feelings in an IS project?* Table 3 shows the summary conceptualization of the answers. The interpretive case study together with the rich empirical data gave us the opportunity to categorize the relationship between feelings and emotional practices within IS project members.

We identified several feelings that IS project members felt in the project work (dissatisfaction, fear, irritation, blame, frustration, feeling of failure), and how these specific feelings are good or bad for certain common issues in an IS project. In this project, emotional practices of using power, criticizing, airing frustration, seeking support, adjusting situation/ adapting to unwanted situation, using black humor or sarcasm, gossiping, practicing avoidance or withdrawal, show how IS project members strive to modify feelings that are not desirable for them personally.

In this study, feelings are classified as a subjective experience whereas emotion always involves some emotional practice. Emotional practices in this sense are manipulations of feelings [26]. Thus, what an IS project member felt was not considered a result of what has happened; rather it was more an indication of what will happen. Viewing emotion as a kind of practice means that we recognize that emotions are ‘embodied’ and cannot be described as one as they are embedded in a particular social setting [26]. Thus, emotional practices are habits, and everyday pastimes that lead people to achieve a certain emotional state (ibid.). Emotional practices also seem to construct a productive force that can help accomplish an organizational goal (cf. [21]). This study also shows that negative emotional practices can also lead to further dysfunctional feelings or support existing negative feelings. We noticed that in this IS project, feelings strongly affect the decision-making and feelings control different processes (cf. [10]). This led us to analyze feelings in more detail from the



view that, 'what feelings produce during this IS project'. Previous research on emotions in IS projects has focused on the nature and role of emotions in IS innovation [23], the emotional dissonance IT professionals may feel as they interface with others in the workplace [24] and the emotions in a so-called "rational" profession [15]. The lack of specific studies on emotional practices in an IS project that are triggered by specific feelings further justifies the significance of our study.

This study shows what kinds of 'emotional practices' emerge when specific feelings arise in an IS project. We observed the emerged feelings that are akin to negative feelings such as: dissatisfaction, fear, irritation, blame, frustration, and the feeling of failure seem to have lead to an emotional practice that significantly influenced the IS project. Our line of reasoning is helpful not only for understanding what feelings are present under what conditions but also how these feelings affect different practices which then have for example further implications for the productivity of the IS project. The IS project also shows that in situ, one will find a combination of different feelings that may lead to same emotional practice (see table 3). It is also evident that people were quite keen to cultivate working conditions to meet their own needs in this particular IS project. This led to the situation that other people had 'negative' interpretations and people projected their feelings onto other IS project members, such as blaming others for one's own feelings. It is also more evident that those employees who experienced some degree of challenge also felt frustration and failure. Some studies (e.g. [18]) emphasize that when feelings are ignored, people are not as committed to do things as well as they could, and they are not motivated in their work. It was also evident that when IS project members lost status (Nofco consortium) the group dynamic became much more complicated because the feelings experienced and emotions expressed were not in harmony with each other.

Different emotional practices are involved in all communication, decision-making and action. Therefore it is important and beneficial to understand them more deeply also in an IS project context. The influence of emotions on decision-making has been emphasized in studies on organizational behavior [9], and widely accepted especially in relation to incidental emotions and moods. Our study shows examples of consequences that affect the progress of IS project. This project may have unfolded in very different ways if they had started Project II with a clean slate without the "tyranny of history" (i.e. Project I). For future research we suggest in more detail investigation of whether there are specific

feelings that are mutually exclusive in IS projects. Besides, it would be important and useful for IS project management to understand implicit emotion regulation and its consequences in an IS project. Emotion regulation refers to the ways in which people aim to actively manage their emotional states [18], for instance, by denying, weakening, masking, modifying, or completely hiding them. Examples of recommended research questions include the following: How do individuals exert personal control over the use of their emotions? Do organizations exert control over individuals to the extent that the individuals' emotions are controlled? Such studies would help us understand better the possible conflict between felt feelings and emotional displays (i.e. emotion regulation/ masking). Historical studies would be needed to examine the changes in feelings and the associated emotional practices over time. The model ('feelings lead to emotional practices') could also be further developed to ask the reverse question: what effects emotional practices have on IS project members feelings? (i.e. a reciprocal model). This would demand a research design that especially focuses on what feelings emerge/occur as a consequence of an identified emotional practice. Such study should be longitudinal, observing and interviewing subjects over time.

## 7. Conclusion

The significance of our interpretive case study consists of the topic's novelty, the method employed and the findings' strong potential for improved IS project management practices. *Firstly*, although emotions and emotional practices have been studied in other disciplines, our extensive literature review showed there is a lack of systematic studies in the information systems field and IS project management. *Secondly*, the rich data we revisited for this article was collected through free flowing interviews without the researcher's intervention to direct the subjects' description of their lived experience during the course of the IS project. The researchers made a conscious effort to stay sensitive to possible biases and distortions in the narratives and focused on those emotional practices that were triggered by the often negative feelings described in the narratives by the individual IS project member. *Thirdly*, as it has become more or less generally accepted that feelings and emotions rather than rationalization based on facts, affect all human decision-making to the extent that it is legitimate to state that the human decision-making process is never purely rational and the more we understand the feelings and the associated emotional practices in an

IS project the better. Our study advises project management on the many different types of feelings that lead to the same emotional practice, which consequently may hinder the progress of a project.

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## 9. References

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